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This brief report reviews the effect of three counseling interviews on the first semester academic achievement of 31 superior freshmen students as compared with a controlled group of 31 matched students receiving no counseling. The findings indicated no significant difference in academic achievement between the counseled and non-counseled students; however, the author suggests several recommendations for further and more comprehensive research.

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The Effectiveness of Limited Counseling in Improving the Academic Achievement of Superior College Freshmen

AYSEL SEARLES, JR.

WITH THE increasing national concern for the maximum growth of superior students and the limited time available for counseling, there appears to be ample justification for research as to whether or not limited counseling will effect improved academic achievement by superior college freshmen [*1*, *2*].

The hypothesis underlying this investigation was that "three interview" counseling would facilitate academic achievement through: (1) improving the counselee's perception of reality and (2) alleviating specific fears. The process of counseling used had as one objective the detection of any major deviation between the student's perception of himself as he related to his new environment and the actual facts insofar as they were available to the investigator. Subsequent counseling centered about those apparent discrepancies and was eclectic in nature.

In addition to the limitations of sample described below, another major limitation of this study should be emphasized.

"Three interview" counseling may be too brief an exposure to expect significant behavioral change. This could be a particularly pertinent limitation when applied to carefully screened superior students who already have a history of relatively successful achievement despite whatever problems they might have.

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This article reports essential elements of the author's master's thesis prepared under the general direction of A. Gordon Nelson, Cornell University. The author wishes to acknowledge the assistance of Dr. Nelson in this research.

The Sample

The subjects of this study were freshmen entering Harpur College, the college of arts and sciences of the State University of New York, in the fall of 1958. To be eligible for selection, the student must not have attended another college, must not have been a veteran of military service, and must have graduated from high school within nine months of the beginning of the study.

While a few colleges have experimented with purely statistical data in establishing regression equations, college admission, in general, tends to remain a clinical process, with a statistical floor. In view of this, it was determined to select the superior students for this study on a clinical basis, including the recommendation of the high school principal or counselor, but undergirding the clinical selection process with a minimum level of ability and achievement as recorded on the official records of the Admissions Office. The criteria for selection as a superior student depended, in addition to the high school recommendation, on:

1. Ranking at least in the upper third of the high school graduating class.
2. Achievement of scores within the upper third on all parts of the State University of New York Admissions Test.

Secondary consideration was given to scores on the Cooperative English Test, Vocabulary and Speed of Reading Comprehension, and it was arbitrarily determined that no student who presented an average in academic subjects below 80 would be considered, even though his test scores might be high.

While there may be disagreement be-

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tween those who favor a purely statistical approach to selection and those who favor a clinical approach, and while there may be room for debate over what lines to draw in deeming a student superior who may have a speed of reading comprehension score below the median but be a class valedictorian, it should be emphasized that these disagreements should not preclude experimentation along any given line, as long as the samples are adequately defined and delineated.

The names of 62 students pre-selected as the superior sample were alphabetized and placed alternately into experimental (A) and control (B) groups of 31 students each. As part of the delimitations of this study it should be noted that in view of a student housing shortage, admissions standards for women were somewhat higher than for men; hence, both the experimental and control groups contain a majority of female students. It should be noted further that all subjects were graduates of New York State high schools.

In view of the fact that comparability of the experimental and control groups in terms of ability and prior achievement was basic to this investigation, *t*-tests were made to ascertain if observed differences were statistically significant. These results are reported in TABLE 1.

An inspection of TABLE 1 shows that there is no statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups in the areas measured. It might be pertinent to point out that the mean Total Score for both groups on the SUNY Admissions Test is equal to the 93rd percentile of college freshmen norms. While not called for in the study because the data were incomplete, it might be helpful in establishing the rating of "superior" for both groups to note that in the experimental group, the high schools reported Intelligence Quotient test results for 25 of the 31 students in the group, and the mean IQ of these 25 students was 130.9. In the control group, the high schools reported Intelligence Quotient test results for 28 of the 31 students, and their mean IQ was 131.3.

Procedure

With an underlying philosophy of understanding and acceptance, and with the dual objectives of improving perception and alleviating specific fears, it was determined to schedule a minimum of three personal interviews with each member of the experimental group, with the understanding that any counselee would receive additional counseling or referral to special aid if he

TABLE 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and *t*-Test results of Comparisons of High School Averages and Tests of Ability of Students in the Experimental and Control Groups (N = 31 in each Group)

Comparison Basis	*Experimental Group*		*Control Group*		
	X	*SD*	*X*	*SD*	*t*
High School Average	88.7	3.3	88.0	4.2	0.72
SUNY Admissions Test Verbal Score	48.7	4.6	48.8	5.4	0.05
SUNY Admissions Test Quantitative Score	43.4	3.3	43.2	4.1	0.63
SUNY Admissions Test Total Score	92.1	6.1	91.9	6.9	0.08
Cooperative English Vocabulary Score	34.8	7.5	35.2	8.4	0.19
Cooperative English Speed of Reading Comprehension Score	37.0	9.9	36.8	9.6	0.09

indicated a desire for either or both of these. The control group was not seen.

During the first interview, held within the first two weeks of the semester, each subject in the experimental group was apprised of his abilities as measured by the entrance examination scores and given reassurance as to his or her ability to do good academic work at Harpur College. Also during this interview, each student was told that he had been selected as a part of a special study group specifically on the basis of the expectation that he could achieve exceptionally well in the academic program.

While a portion of this first interview was of necessity given over to the factual review of the student's ability, high school record, and academic promise at the college, there was also discussion of the student's vocational and educational objectives and an effort was made to establish sufficient rapport so that the student would be willing to discuss any problems of adjustment to the college that he or she might have. The academic program of each student was also reviewed.

The second interview was held during the two-week period following the release of six-week "down-grade" reports from the faculty. The presence or absence of such reports was noted by the counselor and a general opportunity was provided for a discussion of academic successes or failures and possible reasons if failures existed. Again, ample time was provided for discussion of such adjustment problems as the student might present.

The third interview was scheduled within the two-week period preceding final examinations for the semester. As a part of this interview, students in the experimental group were asked to estimate the degree of success or of failure they expected in grades in each course. While these estimates played no formal role in the study, it was felt they helped to focus attention on a purpose of the counseling and would also help students verbalize any problems of an academic nature. The investigator was the only counselor who participated in the study.

As criteria as to whether the counseled group excelled the non-counseled control group in academic achievement, five areas were measured.

1. Number of subjects completing the semester.

2. The grade-point average, which was obtained by dividing the total net grade points earned by the total hours carried, wherein the grade of A gives three points; B, two; C, one; D, none; F, minus one.

3. Number of subjects placed on academic probation for failure to receive a C (1.0) average.

4. Number of students who earned a B (2.0) grade-point average and who were placed on the Dean's list for honor in scholarship.

5. Achievement recorded in two courses common to all freshmen, that is Communications I and Social Science I. Findings are reported in TABLE 2.

Findings

To ascertain whether observed differences in certain areas of achievement between the experimental (counseled) and control (non-counseled) groups were statistically significant, *t*-tests and chi-square tests were applied to the data following Wert, Neidt and Ahmann [3].

On the basis of statistical analysis we have no evidence to refute the null hypothesis that under the counseling conditions set forth in the study, there is no significant

TABLE 2

Summary of Results

Achievement Measure	*Experimentals* (N = 31)	*Controls* (N = 31)	t or X^2
First Semester Grade-Point Average	1.58	1.44	0.80 (t)
Grades in Communications	1.81	1.45	1.70 (t)
Grades in Social Science	1.61	1.68	0.27 (t)
Number completing the full semester	31	29	0.52 (X^2)
Number on honor list	7	10	0.73 (X^2)
Number placed on academic probation	4	7	0.44 (X^2)

difference in academic achievement between the counseled and the non-counseled students. Three-interview counseling does not appear to have any significant effect on the first-semester academic achievement of freshmen in a small liberal arts college who have measured ability and recorded achievement within the upper third of a sample of New York State high schools.

Recommendations for Further Research

1. The students in this investigation ranked in the upper third of their high school peers in terms of both ability and achievement. A study seems warranted in which college freshmen are selected on the basis of good ability but relatively poor achievement. The effectiveness of counseling in this area could be ascertained.

2. In the experimental group of this study, about half of the superior students evidenced a need or desire for counseling, while the other half did not. Research is suggested wherein a pool of students is identified early in the freshman year as both superior and in need of counseling. This pool might then be separated into counseled and non-counseled equated groups to determine the effectiveness of counseling on achievement under these circumstances.

3. In this investigation, it would appear that about half the counseling interviews were relatively wasted on superior freshmen who had no need for or interest in counseling. A modification of the second study above is proposed, wherein the number of counseling sessions is at least doubled, thereby investing the same total amount of time but in a group that has expressed need or desire for counseling.

4. There remains an open question as to whether the problems of superior college students are relatively similar to the problems of average students. The clinical aspects of this study indicate that the problems are similar but a separate investigation designed to test this hypothesis would seem to have merit.

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